

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1813

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

CONFIDENTIAL BEIRUT 7521

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE

SUBJECT: REORGANIZATION OF THE LEBANESE CABINET: ADDITIONAL COMMENT.

REF: BEIRUT 7480

1. SUMMARY: REACTION TO FRANGIE CABINET RESHUFFLE AND APPOINTMENT OF CHAMOUN AS ACTING PRIME MINISTER ALMOST UNIVERSALLY HOSTILE. FRANGIE/CHAMOUN CAN NOW PRESSURE SARKIS AND, WITH SKAFF AS MINISTER OF FINANCE, CAN EFFECT NUMBER OF LAST-MINUTE APPOINTMENTS AND CHANGES WHICH KARAME HAD BEEN HOLDING UP. MAY 20 CABINET MEETING UNLIKELY TO HAVE QUORUM. END SUMMARY.

2. LEBANESE POLITICAL CIRCLES ARE REACTING IN PREDICTABLE FASHION TO PRESIDENT FRANGIE'S MOVE ON SEPTEMBER 15 RESHUFFLING CABINET (SEE REFTEL). AMONG TRADITIONAL MOSLEM

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LEADERS, PRIME MINISTER KARAME SAID "I CONSIDER WHAT

HAS HAPPENED TO BE A STAB IN THE BACK...THIS ACTION IS
EAGAINST THE CONSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM AND TRADITION
SINCE 1943."; SAEB SALAM SAID "I CONDEMN THIS ACTION...
WE FIND CRIMINALS...PERSISTING IN THEIR CRIMES."
PDLAMIC COUNCIL ISSUED AHPATEMENT DESCRIBING
FRANGIE'S ACTION "AS A FLAGRANT VIOLANT OF
CONSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE." PHALANGE LEADER PIERRE
CEMAYLE IS REPORTED TO HAVE REPEATED HIS SON'S STATEMENT
THAT HIS PARTY WAS NOT CONSULTED AND COMMENTED RATHER
LAMELY THAT MR. FRANGIE MUST HAVE HAD HIS REASONS.
DEFEATED PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE RAYMOND EDDIE CRITICIZED
FRANGIE'S ACTION BUT STRESSED THAT IF SARKIS CAN ASSUME
OFFICE, HE CAN QUICKLY NULLIFY THESE DECISIONS.
JUNBLATT'S NATIONAL MOVEMENT CONDEMNED MOVE AND SOME
NEWSPAPERS REGARDING IT AS FIRST STEP TOWARDS PARTITION.

3. PURPOSE OF THIS FRANGIE/CHAMOUN MOVE APPEARS TO
BE TWOFOLD -- TO STRENGTHEN THEIR POSITION BOTH BEFORE
AND AFTER INAUGURATION OF SARKIS. AS MMINISTERS OF
DEFENSE AND FINANCE, CHAMOUN AND SKAFF CAN NOW ISSUE
ORDERS THAT KARAME HAS BEEN DELAYING FOR MONTHS. AS
ACTING PRIME MINISTER, CHAMOUN'S POWER IN WANING
DAYS OF FRANGIE REGIME IS DRAMATICALLY INCREASED.
ALTHOUGH LESS THAN A WEEK REMAINS BEFORE SARKIS IS
TO BE SWORN IN, CHAMOUN HAS ANNOUNCED THAT A CABINET
MEETING WILL BE HELD ON MONDAY, SEP 20. SUCH A MEETING
WOULD ENABLE FRANGIE/CHAMOUN TO MAKE A NUMBER OF NEW
APPOINTMENTS, SUCH AS DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL BANK AND
GOVERNOR OF MT. LEBANON, AND FILL A NUMBER OF KEY
VACANCIES IN ARMY AND CIVIL SERVICE. EVEN IF SARKIS
WERE TO DISMISS MANY OF THESE MAN A WEEK LATER, (AND
POLITICALLY IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO DO SO)
THEY WOULD THEN BE ENTITLED TO HANDSOME PENSIONS.

4. THERE IS STILL A QUESTION, HOWEVER, CONCERNING HOW
MANY MINISTERS WILL ATTEND CABINET MEETING. CHAMOUN
AND SKAFF CERTAINLY WILL.
KARAME, EVEN IF HE RETURNS

FROM CAIRO IN TIME, PROBABLY WILL NOT, FOR BOTH
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POLITICAL AND SECURITY REASONS (MEETING WILL BE HELD
IN CHRISTIAN-CONTROLLED EAST BEIRUT). OSSEIRAN, WHO
WAS DISMISSED AS MINISTER OF ECONOMY, WHILE KEEPING
OTHER POSTS, IS INSULTED AND SULKING AND WILL PROBABLY
STAY AWAY. MAJID ARSLAN, THE DRUZE MEMBER, IS IN
POOR HEALTH WHICH HE WILL PROBABLY USE AS AN EXCUSE
TO STAY HOME. THUS THE KEY MAN IS GHASSAN TUEINI, WHO
HAS BEEN TRYING TO PLAY A CONCILIATORY ROLE BETWEEN

THE KFOUR FRONT AND THE TRADITIONAL MOSLEM LEADERS OF

MWIZAT BEIRUT. IF HE DECIDED NOT TO GO, THERE WILL BE NO QUORUM. L'ORIENT 18 SEPTEMBER REPORTS TUEINI HAD NOT, AS OF SEPTEMBER 17, RECEIVED NOTICE OF COUNCIL MEETING AND IN ANY CASE WOULD BE OUT OF COUNTRY SEPTEMBER 20 DUE TO PRIOR COMMITMENTS.

5. COMMENT: THIS LAST-MINUTE CABINET RESHUFFLE HAS RAISED THE POLITICAL TEMPERATURE AND MADE IT MORE DIFFICULT FOR SARKIS TO APPOINT A CABINET OF TECHNOCRATS AND INITIATE A LEBANESE -LEBANESE DIALOGUE IN A MORE RELAXED ATMOSPHERE. FRANGIE/CHAMOUN MAY HAVE DELIBERATELY TAKEN THIS STEP TO MAKE THINGS AS DIFFICULT AS POSSIBLE FOR SARKIS, HOPING THAT HE WILL FAIL TO ACHIEVE A MEANINGFUL CEASE-FIRE. THIS IN TURN MIGHT PERSUADE THE SYRIANS TO GO FOR THE "MILITARY OPTION" WHICH FRANGIE/CHAMOUN BELIEVE IS INEVITABLE. REGARDLESS OF WHAT HAPPENS NEXT, FRANGIE'S ACTION MEANS THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE HISTORY OF LEBANON PRACTICALLY ALL THE EXECUTIVE POWER IS IN THE HANDS OF THE MARONITES.

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